

# *Insights into Isaiah*

by  
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## **The Incredible Commission**

As we begin the study of the book of the prophet Isaiah, we have the privilege of looking at the actual call of the prophet. In chapter 6 in the book of Isaiah there is the story of how Isaiah was called and given his Incredible Commission. In chapter 6, the first thing we notice here is the holy presence of God:

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke" (Isaiah 6:1-4).

As you read you get the impression of Isaiah standing in the temple. Suddenly this manifestation occurred before him. He was deeply stirred because he was seeing the Glory of the sovereign God, sitting upon His throne. Also he heard the seraphim saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts." This occurred at a time in Isaiah's career when sin was rampant in the country. No wonder that we read of his reaction:

"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5).

Isaiah was brought under the personal conviction of his own sin and responded by confessing his personal sin. There wasn't any question in Isaiah's mind that he was unfit: he could feel it.

Standing in the presence of God and seeing God as He was, he was impressed with his own personal sins, causing him to say: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. I am right in the midst of sinfulness." Then a wonderful thing happened:

"Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (Isaiah 6:6-7).

Isaiah is shown how cleansing is the Grace of God. Isaiah did not get himself ready: he did not clean himself up. This seraphim brought a live coal from off the altar and touched his lips and cleansed him. This was the vision and Isaiah was given to understand that God would make him fit. God would actually prepare him for service.

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

Thus Isaiah received his incredible commission: "Who is going to go, whom shall I send to tell the people the truth?" Isaiah volunteered. He had seen the Glory of God, he had felt his own sinfulness, but he had also seen the grace of God. He knew that God would cleanse him: "Here am I, send me." "I know

what it is to be cleansed; I know what this blessing of God can be." The cleansed soul was ready to serve in declaring the Gospel, to carry it out to others.

Isaiah was given further instructions which were amazing. He was told to go and preach continually, but he was warned the people would not believe him. The longer he preached the less they would believe. He was told that this would be his mission: he was to declare the judgment of God and the grace of God. The judgment of God would be that God would punish these people. Isaiah was to warn them that if they did not repent they would be destroyed. His commission was to tell the people that God would judge their sin, but the people would not listen to him. He was to preach "until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man and the land be utterly destroyed." This was the judgment of God, and Isaiah had this to declare.

There was also word of a promise that would later come to pass: "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten" (Isaiah 6:13). In other words, there would be a remnant who would turn to God. The prophet was to declare to the people that sin is sin, and God will judge sin: "If you stay in your sin and remain incorrigible, God will destroy you." What seems so strange is that the very people who belong to God would be wiped out. Yet there would be some who would believe, a few true believers; and God would save them: there would be a remnant. This is one great truth we get from the prophet Isaiah; in the time of judgment, when God in all His faithfulness and righteousness will destroy because of sin, there will be some people who will turn to Him. These are they who will be saved by the grace of God.

## **Song Of The Vineyard**

In this portion of the book the prophet Isaiah tells a parable which sets forth the whole message that he is conveying to the people of Israel and the people of Judah. We can call it the Song of the Vineyard; it is in Isaiah, chapter 5:1-7. The prophet tells this parable indicating that a man planted a vineyard with care and protected it from harm expecting good fruit.

"... My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes" (Isaiah 5:1-2)

Everything had been done to have good results in this vineyard, so that the owner might be able to harvest the grapes and make the wine. He had arranged to protect it from harm expecting good fruit. But in actual results the vineyard produced only wild grapes to his great disappointment. This is the prophet's figurative poetic way of pointing out disappointing results in Israel, after all that God had done for them.

God had prepared the whole situation for Israel's benefit. He had given them the land of Canaan. He had given them His promises. He had been with them, protected them from their enemies and had actually given them victory over the people of the land. He had arranged that everything should be as good as it possibly could be. But the people of Israel, His own people, did not produce the kind of godliness, the kind of life for which God was looking.

"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes" (Isaiah 5:3-4).

The results was not reasonable. With all the care that He had given to it the owner rightly expected a crop of good fruit.

The blessing of the grace of God should produce in His people conduct that would please Him: reverence to Himself, respect for those in authority, consideration toward others and charity toward the

poor. This is the conduct that God had the right to look for among His people. When He found among His people injustice and oppression He rejected them in condemnation.

"And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment: but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry" (Isaiah 5:5-7).

In other words, because it had happened the way in which it had, and it turned out as badly as it did, there was just one thing He now would do: He would destroy it. He would break down the fences to let the wild animals come in and run over the place. He would not take care of it any more; He would not cultivate the soil; He would let it go to ruin because it was not producing what it was supposed to produce. In this parable, we see God's desire for righteousness: God is the Judge, and He looks for godliness in the conduct of His people.

The one aspect of godliness that can be seen by everyone is the treatment of other persons in righteousness. When you think about a person living right, and doing right, you cannot recognize this by merely looking at them. You must see what they do and how they conduct themselves. "By their fruits, ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). The way they feel does not appear; however, the way they treat their neighbor does. Their actions are used as the criterion. When godly conduct and righteous dealings with other people is absent, God will condemn. This was Israel's fate in the time of Isaiah.

The Christian will see in this parable, simply told, that God will judge His people. God actually will destroy His people. When we think about the things God will do in grace and mercy, our mind turns to the promises in Christ. Because it is in the eternal will of God we can expect to find it in the Book of Isaiah. However, it is not seen clearly at this point. We know in the whole gospel message that God will make the desert blossom like the rose and He will actually bring to pass that which will be glorifying to Him in His grace. He will do this through Christ Jesus, there is no question about that. So while the vineyard itself turned out to be utterly a failure, this simply sets up the situation in which God is going to bring in His Messiah, to lead His people through to Himself.

Isaiah has been called to preach to people who are disobedient, ungodly, and are indifferent about God. Toward those in authority they are disobedient, conducting themselves in such a way that no one wants to rule. The people take advantage of each other. They are impudent to the righteous and ignore the poor. The general conduct of living in the country of Israel in the time of Isaiah was sinful. The very thing that God had designed for blessing and for His glory turned out to be useless and fruitless. Judgment was certain to come. This is the way Isaiah saw it in his time. We can remember as we are reading in the portion of the book, that the prophet has a wonderful thing to tell the people. God will send His own Servant, who will deliver those who put their trust in Him, in spite of the general condition of sin everywhere.

## **The Prince of Peace**

As we continue in our study of the book of the prophet Isaiah, it will be wise for us to keep in mind the whole purpose of Scripture. The Bible, the Scriptures, the Word of God was not written for the purpose of explaining the world to us. The Bible was not written in order that as a consequence of the Bible the whole world would be changed. The truth of the matter is that Almighty God, Creator of the world and Judge of all the earth, "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." The great truth of the Bible is, that God sent His Son into the world to redeem those who would put their trust in Him. Man was, and is in trouble. The trouble he has starts out in the form of sin which sows the wind and reaps the whirlwind. All around are

the consequences of sin, and man suffers because of it. Then into this confusion, and out from. the grace of God comes the Gospel of God.

The Gospel of God tells the whole wide world of God's plan to send His own Son into the world that mankind might have the opportunity of receiving the blessing of God. His Son comes as the Prince of Peace, and we can see Him as He is talked about in Isaiah 9:1-7. Here is a wonderful presentation of the One who is to come as the Prince of Peace. In this description we can see several important truths. First we see an emphasis placed upon the distinction between darkness and light. Then our attention is drawn to the promise which is for all Israel forever, and for the government to come. Finally, we are told about the Prince, who has come, and who will come; the Prince of Peace.

Darkness and light presents in a very striking way the classic description of the Gospel. It is a simple revelation of what Christ will do. Darkness is the original, natural state. You do not need to do anything to have it dark. You need not turn on any power to have darkness. Darkness is simply the condition in which there is no light. Natural man is in darkness in himself; he needs the light of life that comes in the face of Jesus Christ. Light is from God. It is produced by the power of God. God said, "Let there be light and there was light." And later on, the Lord Jesus Christ coming into the world said, "I am the light of the world." We may well remember that light reveals; wherever there is light, there is understanding. Another marvelous truth is that light heals. It is not only true that light reveals and you can see the sin, but light heals, and the sin can be healed. And light promotes growth. Plants grow where there is light. Things will not grow in the dark nor will they prosper in the dark; but they will prosper in the light, in the presence of God. In these two words, darkness and light, can be felt immediately the great difference that is the result of the coming of the Son of God.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world and whosoever receives Him is brought out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

The promise that was made to all Israel is variously described in the Bible. One way of describing the blessing of God in Christ Jesus is to say that believers will be living in a state where there is no night and no darkness. The Bible says, "In Him was no darkness at all." As in the creation God said, "Let there be light; and there was light," even so in the New Testament we read, "The entrance of thy Word giveth light." The promise was that Christ would come as the light of the world, and that when He came the darkness could not "comprehend Him." What this really means is, the darkness could not put Him down, the darkness could not put Him out. It is an interesting thing about light and darkness that you cannot have them both at the same time. Darkness has absolutely no power against light. When the light shines the darkness is gone. There is no such thing as mixing them. As a matter of fact, if you have light and bring in a certain amount of darkness, the light just shines brighter. It is on the darkest night that the stars shine brightest.

Another great truth in this Scripture is that this blessing of God is to be in the form of government. We are reminded that there is a government of God that is to come. when Christ Jesus comes, He comes to rule. We speak about Him bringing the Kingdom of God. The very word Kingdom implies rule. When men studied the Scriptures to find out about the coming of Messiah they found that the Scriptures reported; "Out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel" (Matthew 2:6). One of the ways in which the peace of God is brought into human hearts and minds is that God takes over control. That is why there is peace. That is why there is no confusion, and why things work out well. All this government is headed up in one Person, the Prince of Peace. He is the Prince who is to come. All Scripture reveals the truth that Christ will come to rule. He will come to lead, He will come to comfort, and to protect when He comes as the Mighty Prince. Those who put their trust in Him can rest in peace because He is God.

## The Day Of The Lord

Continuing in the study of the book of the prophet Isaiah, we notice that Isaiah took the national experience of Judah to point up certain truths from God. God had a hand in guiding Judah in their attitude and in their response to opposition from natural forces. Earlier Isaiah had predicted how God would shatter error and disobedience. The prophet began his book by pointing out the widespread evil throughout the nation. Isaiah was called to minister to the people of God, and the first word he was given to say was that God would judge sin. As surely as there was a God in heaven, sin would be judged and the sinner would be disciplined by God. This was proclaimed because Israel and Judah had become incorrigible in their disobedience. It seemed that there was nothing that God could do even through His prophets that would turn His people back to Him.

God had finally announced through the prophets that He would destroy His people, and He did. First He destroyed the Northern Kingdom, and afterwards destroyed the Southern Kingdom also. In recording these destructive acts of God there was one phrase used over and over again in the prophets; "The day of the Lord." Isaiah uses it a number of times. The meaning seems to be that this refers to that time when God is acting in judgment. Then He will bring to pass on the face of this earth His judgment and His destruction of all that is evil. He will expose error and will shatter sin. He will destroy it by the power of God through Christ the Lord. In Isaiah 2:1-4 there is a vision of the glorious future which God would bring to pass when sin was destroyed. God would set up His Kingdom of righteousness and peace. While Isaiah was still living in Israel Judah was still in its sin. Isaiah was preaching to them about it and warned them of the calamities that would occur in "the day of the Lord."

The natural world would one day be destroyed in the judgment of God. Judah, God's own people, had foolishly fallen into natural ways. They had sinfully done just as other unbelieving people had done. So Judah stood in danger of being swept away in the natural destruction that God would bring when "the day of the Lord" came. God would sweep through the whole world with His powerful judgments, and Judah would be destroyed unless they turned to God. The prophet called them, "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Isaiah 2:5). In view of what God intends to do: "Come ye, and let us walk with Him." Repent while there is yet time! So he continues to urge, "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord." Isaiah announces the judgment of God and then offers the only action which has any hope; turn to God, yield to God. The evidence is plain, you are sinning! He points out to them that they are doing as the other people around about them had done. when God's people act just like unbelievers, they put themselves in line for trouble. God is no respecter of persons. God is against sin, and if sin is among His people, God will judge sin wherever it is found.

Isaiah is saying to the people of God that as surely as they have gone in the ways of unbelieving people God will certainly judge them. He calls on them to repent while yet there is time. He makes reference to the future and its bearing upon the present. So far as Judah is concerned the future has in it two things: the coming destruction of the natural which is sure, and the marvelous promise that after His judgment God will show His mercy and His grace. So the wise thing to do is to turn to God. Isaiah would say in modern language, "Get smart! Turn to God, while you have time. You know God is going to come in judgment: and you know that God is almighty and no man can stand up to Him. You can ask the mountains to fall on you and the rocks to fall on you, when God starts working on this thing. Come to Him, turn to Him now, and seek Him in the spirit."

There is another aspect of truth which Isaiah does not bring into the picture at this point. In the Scripture, the day of Christ, the day of the Messiah, the day of the Chosen One of God will be when He will come as Judge. The New Testament tells about this. It is what the Apostle Paul looked for, the coming of the Son of God who will come to judge the living and the dead. It will be the Son of God who comes to judge, and it will be the Son of God who comes to save. Every repentant soul will be saved in

Him. while the day of the Lord Jesus Christ is not named in this portion of Scripture when reference is made to the day of the Lord, it is included in the total overall revelation of the plan of God. When mention is made of the day of the Lord, have in mind so far as this world is concerned judgment is for sure! But in the sovereign plan of God, salvation by the power of God for those who put their trust in Him is also sure.

## **The Rod of His Anger**

Our study of this book of the prophet Isaiah will reveal to us certain aspects of truth about the amazing procedure that God employed in dealing with His people. God is the One who is over all things in the world, because, He is the God of all the earth. We understand God to be the sovereign God. He made all men and He judges all men.

We learn from Scripture that God's hand prevails in all that happens. We realize that His ways are past finding out; but one thing we know, God is sovereign! There are aspects of God's way of doing things that can be seen and can be understood. God can make even the wrath of man to praise Him. There's not a single thing that happens that He can't use. We see in the case of Israel, when the time came for God to bring about real destruction, He brought in the Kingdom of Assyria which He called "the rod of His anger."

The truth of history is that men as they live seek to do as they want to do, as far as they possibly can. To say now that God overrules all that happens, in that He allows this to happen and does not allow anything else to happen, actually puts into God's hands in a very real way the dynamic control of the whole course of history. In a very real sense it is true that God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass. It is also true that God, knowing all things that could have happened, in His great wisdom, in His great overruling control, allows certain things to happen. The events that actually occur in history are things that God allows, and this gives Him dynamic control. And this is why we can say that He is the Lord of history.

God is on the Throne, sovereign over all, but this does not mean that the course of history is His will. This does not mean that God plans to produce what is happening. He allows this to happen rather than that, and in that sense God is in dynamic control; but, He didn't start it. He allows what happens, but He does not start it. In Daniel 2:31-45 there is the description of a vision that is very important. It's a vision of history. Daniel saw all history portrayed before him in the form of a man lying on the ground. This man had a helmet of gold, and armor of silver and of brass and of iron. In that vision Daniel saw coming from heaven a great stone, called "an unhewn stone", which fell on the feet of the image and smashed it. This is what he interpreted to the King of Babylon: something coming from outside, from above, from the presence of God in heaven, the "unhewn stone", crashing in upon the historical process of human events, smashing it and setting up something new and different. This pictures the way God does things.

As revealed in that vision, there comes a time in history when God brings something to pass that did not originate in human affairs. It happened to human events, but it did not arise from human beings. This stone was an "unhewn " stone. Nobody shaped it or made it. This was something from God, and it fell on that image in the vision. This seems to reveal that God can bring certain things to pass that do not originate in human hearts, yet they affect human beings. God who is watching over things, at a certain time which would be His time, would bring something into human affairs that did not come from man, but from God. This seems to predict plainly the coming of Christ; the coming of the Messiah.

"In the fulness of time God sent forth His Son." While it is true that He was made of a woman and made under the law, we know that He was not born of man. He was conceived of the Holy Ghost. He was born of God and this is the One whom God hath sent to bring salvation to His people. Christ Jesus came

into this world, not as part of it, not as out from it; but actually as the One who will control it. The work of Christ is never part of the natural process, but it will stop the natural process in its tracks. when we think of power politics and God, we may have in mind that men may connive, may plan to manipulate by power to win their goal, but God is Judge and can destroy all the activities of the powers of man any time He wants to. He is Almighty God! And He can bring man's activities before Him to judge them and destroy them at His will.

God chooses His instruments. He will use any development as it suits His purpose to bring His will to pass. He actually wants to produce people who will be like the Lord Jesus Christ as members of His body. This is what God actually wants to produce, and He will use any means at all toward this end; eventually bringing in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. When we think of history, and we think about all the various things going on among men in the affairs of men; when we think of all the conflicts, the tensions, the disagreements, the arguments, and the wars that go on, we may remember the power of God that can reconcile all things in and through His Son, Jesus Christ. God is able to make "all things work together for good to them that love Him." The natural world is never reconciled, but the spiritual world is reconciled in Christ. The Assyrian was the rod of His anger, even as Christ Jesus was the expression of His love and mercy.

## **Anatomy of Rebellion**

Isaiah not only revealed the judgment of God upon the nations of the world, but he also revealed the judgment of God upon His own people. God is no respecter of persons. He neither favors anyone person above another, nor does He specially discount anyone person beneath another. God is fair to everybody and God will judge sin. "He is of purer eyes than to behold evil." If the nations of the world are sinful, they will be judged. God will judge sin wherever it is found. God's own people can be contaminated and infected with sin, even though they do belong to God. In our own outlook, we would recognize people who are worldly and people who are spiritual. They can both be professors of Christ: they can both be in the Christian church. It is common knowledge that in any congregation there are some people who are spiritually minded: these want the blessing of God. And there are some people in that same congregation who are not spiritually minded. They take life as it comes; they assume God will be good to them, and so they do not give Him any special attention. They do not attend church services, they do not read or study the Bible, they do not pray, they do not turn to God about anything. I understand such persons are carnal, and I will call them worldly.

God will judge sin. God will judge people turning away from Him. He will judge those who ignore Him. He will not be set aside by anybody. There is no such thing as a person turning himself to God, entering into believing relationship with Him at a certain time, and then within the next six months or a year doing as he pleases and counting that the engagement he made with God is going to stand. Not at all! As a matter of fact God will deal with him day by day, and with anyone of us as we commit sin. This is no strange thing. "There is no man that sinneth not." And as surely as I sin, I will find as I go along that there is judgment coming upon sin. The marvelous thing is that "where sin abounds, grace does much more abound." No matter how true it is that God will punish sin, it's also true that God will forgive sin when the individual comes to Him.

Isaiah describes the sins among God's people in his time in chapter 3 of his book. We can understand what he is saying under the general title, "The Anatomy of Rebellion": the structure of rebellion. What does rebellion look like? As the people of God, Israel was committed to obey Him. when I come to God to receive the salvation of God, it does not mean that I am going to be forgiven, and then I can go out and do as I please. No! What that means is that I have a refuge in the Lord. I come to the Lord and

hide myself in Him. Now what does coming to the Lord mean? It means I come to yield myself into His will. I'm going to do it His way as set forth in the Word of God and demonstrate to me in the Lord Jesus Christ. When I commit myself to God in Christ Jesus, I'm actually committing myself into obeying God, and letting the Holy Spirit of God show me the will of Christ, and prompting me to do it. When God's people for any reason turn away from obedience, and refuse the guidance that comes from God that they should repent, then there will be judgment.

Since His people will not obey God, but want to do as they please, God will not give them competent leaders. When a group of people are minded to obey God, God in mercy will help them. One of the ways in which God will help them is that He will give them faithful dedicated leadership. There are persons who do not want to do the will of God. They do not particularly seek to do His will. They want to follow their own ideas. God will not give them competent, capable, dedicated leaders; He will let them have incompetent leaders. He will let them have leaders who will be inadequate to do their work, and the results will be distress. When there is a group of people together without some kind of control, some kind of direction there will be more and more distress. Can you picture a big traffic jam where there is no one in charge? That would be not only frustrating, but as time goes along, it would become downright distressing. This is the kind of trouble God lets His people have. He will allow such even in a congregation. If the church members are not minded to do His will, soon there will be leaders in that church who do not know how to lead. when that happens, there will be trouble in that church. To the natural heart the will of God is often thought of as intolerable. The natural heart turns away from God, because God's will leads into self-denial. When a person doesn't want to deny self and wants to do as he pleases, he cannot follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of this Christian behavior is oftentimes mixed. Some Christians who profess faith are actually still carnal, and walk in the flesh. As churches are organized today, it often happens that many of these people who walk in the flesh actually get into the leadership of the church. In any congregation where the control is in the hands of the officers, there will be some leaders who have selfish ideas, personal ideas. These persons get into the place of leadership and begin to dominate it; and this is actually a judgment from God: a judgment upon that church. When the church as manifested in congregational and denominational affairs is under the control of carnal members, there will be trouble. The Lord Jesus said, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away." And this judgment of God will come down upon His people. In our zeal to honor the grace of God we should be very careful that we do not imply that anybody can be blessed no matter how carnal he is. God will judge sin anywhere, even among His people: even in His church.

## **Stump of the Shoot**

The Scriptures record a promise of blessing to Abraham by the grace of God. That is the beginning of the whole story of the Gospel. God promised Abraham that He would bless him and make him a blessing. But sin brought judgment in which God would destroy. This is the truth all through the Bible. It was demonstrated when God destroyed the whole known world with a flood. It was emphasized by such examples as Sodom and Gomorrah who were completely destroyed. Sin will bring judgment; and yet in destruction God will remember mercy. This is a never-ending wonder. In the destruction which is brought in all fair judgment upon people who are disobedient, God in grace and in mercy will remember to be gracious, as for example in the instance of the flood. When the flood was due to come upon all the earth, God directed Noah to build an ark to save him and his sons. when Sodom and Gomorrah were to be destroyed, God sent special messengers to rescue Lot. Peter said that "God knoweth how to deliver the godly out of judgment," out of temptation.

Mercy triumphs over judgment in righteousness. In this past summer it was my privilege to be in

the company of a man that I've known since we were boys together in high school. This man is now a lawyer and has been a judge in Northern Manitoba, in Canada. He was telling me how as judge, he had to dispense justice to people and how it meant on occasion that punishment would come to them. Then he told me something that struck deeply into my heart. "Whenever a case comes before me, I try first to find out what the facts are. This is the reason for having witnesses. These are brought in, and I listen to their testimony. If I am not sure of what happened, I ask them questions myself, so that I can find out exactly what happened. Then I decide according to the law what the penalty should be. And then I ask myself, Now where is the mercy?" Then he turned to me and asked, "You need that, don't you? You've got to have mercy." And I thought to myself, here I am hearing from a lawyer who is teaching me this great spiritual principle: the judgment of God must include mercy. Mercy must always accompany judgment in righteousness. Judgment is not set aside, but mercy must be there also.

With David there was a covenant promise of blessing through his flesh. He was told that one of his sons, one of his flesh, would sit on the throne forever. But incorrigible sin among his people brought judgment, destruction that would cut down the house of David. This is what the prophets were saying, and Isaiah, as one of the prophets, came and told the people: "You cannot mock God. You have done wrong. You have been sinful. Now repent! If you do not repent, the judgment that will destroy you will be sure to come. God will be nobody's fool and He will destroy where there is sin, but, yet there will be a remnant." This is the part that is so wonderful! David's family, in terms of our topic, is "the stump", that would be cut off, the tree would be broken down; but a "shoot", a new growth, would appear, and out of that root would come something new. "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1). That word "rod" means a green shoot, such as grows up out of a stump that's been cut down, "and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." when the royal descendants of Solomon were blocked by a curse that they would never sit on the throne, God used a descendant of Nathan, a brother of Solomon, but still a son of David, to provide a body for Jesus of Nazareth.

When we hear the Gospel we hear it as an unexpected prophecy. Unexpected because evil was rampant, and we know that God will destroy evil. With evil so prevalent the prediction of a perfect government was certainly unexpected. If everything was so bad, so incorrigibly evil, would not all be totally destroyed? The truth was that it would not, that what God was going to do would not be a result of what man did. It's true that if you put Israel and Judah together, and considered them, you would have to say they would be wiped out. But God would do something in grace. He would bring in a salvation which would not be the result of Judah's action or Israel's action, but would be the undeserved gift of God.

The truth about how things are because of the sin of man is that the course of human affairs will be ruined. This is what Isaiah presented. He told them what sin was really like: immorality, injustice, corruption, and such like. But despite all this being true and death being the expected consequence, God would bring in His salvation. This would not mean death but life. If man were to be given wages for living here on earth, he'd receive death. No question about that! Just plain common honesty and decency would bring this to pass. But if the grace of God were to be exercised, and the grace of God were to be received, there would be a gift; and that gift would be eternal life.

Eternal life is not something for which a person works. It is something a person receives. God will give it because He has promised it. And believe me, Isaiah describes that promise in a wonderful way, and when he finishes his description he says that "nothing that hurts or destroys will enter into his holy mountain." When God does bring His will to pass, and His Kingdom is established through His chosen Messiah, things will be right and good and acceptable to Him in every way. Completely!

## Bankruptcy of Knowledge

In the course of Christian experience we note the fact that the Christian life is grounded in certain beliefs. There are certain things which the Christians believe to be true. These beliefs are formulated in word, and they are expressed in ideas about which you can have knowledge. It is natural that Christians would look to teachers and preachers for guidance as to what they should think. Many of the sermons we hear, the articles we read, and the books we read undertake one way or another to improve our knowledge of what is meant by the Gospel. But to have such an intellectual grasp of the truth of God, an intellectual grasp of the Gospel, is not enough. In actual life such will turn out to be bankrupt.

The truth of God includes commandments to be obeyed. These are not just statements, not just descriptions about something to be seen and to be understood, but commandments to be actually obeyed. There are promises that are to be claimed by faith. It has always been that way throughout the history of God's people; and it was so in the Old Testament times, the times of the prophets. In the book of the prophet Isaiah we can note the clash that came between Isaiah and the "professionals". In Israel there were chosen trained men who could be considered as "professionals". Their business, their vocation, was to lead the people in their thinking about God. Sometimes these leaders allowed natural elements to stimulate them. When they were trying to figure out the truth about God, they thought like human beings and followed natural lines of thought. when this happened spiritual judgment was confused. The professional leaders would not have understanding so the people listening to them would not get it. Isaiah drew attention to this. He pointed out that unless these leaders actually acted upon what they were talking about, they would misunderstand the whole thing. when responsible leaders were so confused, how would the people ever find the truth?

Isaiah revealed that God would reveal Himself to such as were as little children. "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings has thou ordained strength" (Psalm 8:2). This is something that is hard for an intellectual person to understand. How could little children get it? Because little children would just do what they were directed to do. Alien voices have in the history of the church shaken the believers. By the word "alien" is meant voices that were not approved by professionals, voices that were not approved by the leaders. In the history of God's people there have been times when responsible leadership failed to lead and it would look as though the people of God would be left without the truth, but in sovereign grace God would use "unauthorized" channels to reveal His will.

Such an event took place in a big way in history at the time of the Protestant Reformation, when the testimony of the church was bound up largely with the organization of the church, with what could be called "professional leaders". These were not teaching the truth. God raised up unauthorized people, people that were not ordained priests, that were not clergy. Laymen rose up and began to talk about the things of God, and so the whole idea of the Protestant Reformation got under way. Even today it would seem when any denomination or any church group continues for any length of time, the professional leaders seem to become barren. They become formal and act only through their routine. They develop ritualistic ways of worshipping so that the people can sit through a whole service and receive very little blessing. At such times God brings strange voices all around them, which the church is inclined to consider as unauthorized channels.

In our own time we have an emphasis upon "lay evangelism" that begins to touch many people in their churches in all denominations. There are schools of lay evangelism everywhere. There are neighborhood prayer meetings. There are women who get together for Bible study and for prayer, regardless of denominational affiliation. They want to know about God. They want to draw near to the Lord Jesus Christ and they get together in communities to do this. There are also independent projects, missionary projects which are being carried on that are not under denominational control. There is activity going on in the evangelistic world where people are seeking to win young people in college, seeking to win young

people in high school, seeking to win children. There are various forms of this kind of activity in which people are seeking to win people to God and win people to Christ, that are not under the leadership of the church. God uses them to bring in a sense of reality where formal creedal ideas have been too intellectual and have not actually been effectual with the people.

Here is to be seen the darkness and the light of the Gospel. The Gospel, by the way, in itself is never darkness: it is always light. Yet even today there are in the churches those who will criticize the Bible! In the midst of denominational churches, in denominational literature, leaders are writing and talking about the Bible who do not believe it, who actually weaken and destroy faith. This is the darkness. Over against all this is the brightness of the Gospel. God will bring up voices that will tell the truth. He will bring up independent voices that will speak out to the whole world: "Thus saith the Lord." This happens over and over again. Isaiah saw it coming to pass in his day and time. The professional leaders, persons that were ordained, persons that had the public leadership given to them, actually failed because they were being formal and superficial. They neglected to tell the people the truth. God raised up other voices, other sources who were unauthorized, even "alien", strange, who would tell the truth. It was to the glory of God when the truth would be revealed, souls would be blessed.

## **The Alien Work**

As the prophet reveals the truth of God to a rebellious disobedient people, he emphasizes the strange character of what might be called the "Alien Work of God." The background of this is that it is so human and natural for us to expect the blessing of God will be added to our efforts that we push ahead doing the best we can, thinking that God will help us. Out of such wishful thinking ideas are inspired that deal with death. It is possible to think of human experience in such a way, that the idea of death being a judgment upon sin is removed. The popular trend today is to deny that death is the wages of sin. Because everyone dies people are moved to think that death does not mean anything. That's just the point! Everybody sins! And so death is universal.

At the same time there is today a tendency to disparage the idea of hell. The human heart craves some assurance of deliverance. Any human being that knows his right hand from his left is conscious of the fact that death is coming. He hates death, knows hell is a possibility, and he is frightened. It is characteristic of man to try to figure out some way to believe that death is not really so bad, and hell is not really true. This is the very "agreement" they made with death and hell in the days of Isaiah. The attempt to put away "death and hell" is going on to this day. Seldom are people reminded that "the wages of sin is death"; so the preacher would preach that the wages of sin among the members of the congregation will be death. Also the inference of the widespread neglect in the teaching of the leaders is to ignore the whole doctrine of the judgment of God upon the sinful, in denying the reality of hell.

The only way this trend is supported is by a common reliance upon falsehood. This takes place among God's people when Scripture itself is interpreted in such a way as to omit reference to Sill. Today there is such widespread omission, with no reference to the need for repentance. Seldom in church does the pastor in the pulpit preach to his congregation that they must repent. Often the worshipper is made to feel he has done the preacher a big honor by coming to church, and it often seems he is to be treated just as nicely as possible so that he will be sure to come back to that church. When there is in the Bible a statement that sounds a bit harsh it will be left out of the reading but when there is some promise that seems real nice and sweet this will be read. The whole effect is that when all things are read together the worshipper can feel he is pretty good. But this is not true! The Bible is more plain spoken than I often want it to be. To leave out the written words of judgment is to actually present a falsehood.

Often there are interpretations of Scripture by Sunday School teachers and by preachers who

ignore the necessity of, the New Birth. A Sunday School teacher talking to a group of teen-agers, telling them about life, trying to help them to understand how to act, yet wanting to fit in with their wishes and have their good will so they will be sure to come back the next Sunday, will teach and discuss and scarcely ever bring in the idea of the necessity of the New Birth. It is possible that even the teacher is not conscious of this truth that they must be born again, that there is not one of them that can possibly do the will of God without being born again. Often people talk so glibly about "walking with the Lord" on the assumption that anybody could do it. Wait a minute! Anybody can do it *on condition* that he humbly repents and humbly turns to Christ. Certainly! If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive them. But suppose a person does not confess his sins, Suppose he does not repent? Suppose he does not even admit that he is a sinner? Should he be encouraged to talk about walking with the Lord? Such is not the teaching of Scripture. This will never be found in the New Testament.

Ignoring the plain revelation from God is what Isaiah would speak of as a "reliance upon lies." Men are called to faith in God. What would be the foundation of faith? The foundation of faith indicated by Paul is clear: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:11). This is the only faith that is valid, and it was that way in Isaiah's time. The only faith that is operative, the only kind of faith that actually is dynamic and brings results, is faith in God who through His Messiah, through His Chosen One, through Christ Jesus, will work in the people to will and to do of His good will. In other words dying for sin, being raised from the dead, ascending into heaven, praying there for us, coming again, that's Who Christ Jesus is. And it is believing in that, that is the faith that will save the soul. This brings to our mind the fact that the Bible has in it both destruction and hope, and this is the message of the Gospel. In destruction because of sin and hope because of faith we come finally to the strange work of God in Christ. It does seem strange to think that God would send Christ to die in order to bring life. It would seem natural to think if He were going to bring life, He would bring it by being alive, but He doesn't. God sent Christ to die in order that we might live, and the Lord Jesus said, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." So that today in the Gospel we are faced with this strange thing, that can be called an Alien Work: if you want to live, you'll have to die.

## **Faith and Politics**

Faith for a Christian must always mean responding obediently to the Word of God, to the call of God. That's what we mean when we speak about faith, faith in the promises of God. when you speak about Faith and Politics, bringing up the word "politics", you mean human affairs. Man dealing with man to achieve his own end, to get what he wants. There is really no conflict between these two principles. Comparing faith and politics when wondering about them clashing with each other, is like saying that the sunlight doesn't clash with a garden fence: it shines through it. The fence is not designed to enclose sunlight. It is like saying that you would not use a fishnet to catch a sunbeam. In reading the book of Isaiah to see how faith and politics were related in his time, one notes two crises, when these two principles were involved. First the situation involving Syria, and then when Assyria was the center of activity.

Isaiah recognizes that natural forces operate in this world where they are powerful. Human literature, human philosophy and human understanding called science can affect the human mind. On the other hand the believer is affected by his trust in God. In the cases of Syria and Assyria confronting and threatening Judah, Isaiah told his king, first Ahaz and afterwards Hezekiah, to pay no attention to natural factors but to trust in God. Judah belongs to God, and God has given the king a commission: he should carry it out! No one should make the mistake of trying to make this apply to Germany or France or England or the United States of America today. This is not like contemporary political affairs. The national situation in

Isaiah's time involved the people of God. The people of God living in their country were beset by enemies working with natural factors, and they were reminded by the prophet that their trust was in God. The implications of human literature, human philosophy and human science as employed by enemies would seem to challenge those who believe in God. But their trust must be in God, in the Scriptures which are the Word of God. Here can be felt something about the practical works of God.

God doubtless sees and knows what men are doing in the various countries of the world. It may happen that first one country and then another will come to the foreground in international affairs. All this is known to God and is under His hand. But He has never given any commission concerning this to His ministers of the Gospel. There is nothing of any such revelation in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has given a specific commission to the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, which has nothing to do with national affairs: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel." This is the Great Commission. God has the world in mind and He wants the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to tell all human beings that they can be saved through Christ Jesus. If one were interested in what God would bring to pass between Russia and Germany, there is nothing in the Bible about that. There is nothing in the Bible to predict what is going to happen between two of the big football teams in this country. The Bible does not deal with secular events.

Isaiah was aware of the discomfiture of Ahaz, King of Judah, when he faced the practical military issue. Israel (called "Ephraim") the Northern Kingdom, and Syria (called "Damascus") were ganging up against Judah which was a threatening situation. Ahaz was tempted to make alliance with Assyria, a powerful nation in the north, that he might meet these enemies with human strength, man to man. Isaiah urged him not to do it: "Have no part in that! Put your trust in God!" Ahaz was keenly aware of the difficulty. He respected Isaiah because he was a prophet; but he was face to face with a military situation. Even today such situations arise, when many Christians wonder whether the Lord Jesus Christ had anything to say while He was teaching His disciples that would have any bearing upon politics, upon national affairs.

The truth is that the Bible records a statement that is very important: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Certainly, so far as a Christian man is concerned, he is told to pay his taxes (Matthew 17:24-27). The Christian should obey the laws of the land. As a Christian I should be found as a person that is faithful in my conduct as a citizen. I should support the authorities, "the powers that be." I should "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." These two sets of "things" are not identical. There was another great statement made by Christ Jesus: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight . . ." (John 18:36). Here is the answer to the whole problem. If anyone should want to teach that faith in Christ Jesus would have any bearing upon any local political situation in any form or fashion, or would lead Christians in anything that has to do with national affairs, he should remember one thing clearly: Christ Jesus made it as plain as words can make it: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." Then they might be led into politics.

## **Horses Are Flesh**

In the affairs and the experience of men there is often war; and war is in the natural world. Normally speaking, we think of war as between nations. But war also involves man in spiritual matters. So far as any message from Isaiah is to be taken as applying to war in the world today, it should be remembered that Jesus of Nazareth never referred to national wars. when the Son of God was incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth the Empire of Rome was in control of the whole world, and was often involved in wars but there is no mention of such in the New Testament. In reading through the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and noting every word that is reported of Jesus of Nazareth one will not find one reference to any

kind of national war or conflict. This should teach something plainly. It should give all who read to understand that what Jesus of Nazareth was seeking to share had to do with personal relationship with God.

Paul referred to war when he wrote:

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Corinthians 10:3-5).

The Christian is involved in a very real war. But what kind of war am I in? I have war when it comes to what I am to believe. I read in the Bible what God promises. I take these things to heart, and they constitute my faith. Then someone comes along and begins to criticize the Bible, telling me that what I read in the Bible is not true, or that it does not mean what I think it means as I read, thus seeking to take away from me the faith that I have. That puts me into war and so I have my war with people who are seeking to destroy what I cherish.

There may be times when the leadership of my denomination may adopt a policy which would direct me to act in a certain way, which I may feel in my heart is not the way God wants me to go. Here would be conflict. God is able to overrule and God is able to give the victory. I can trust Him, because the believer need not turn to human matters or natural procedures for help. If, for example, I were challenged by some intellectual critic who denies the Scripture and who seeks to show that the Word of Scripture is not true, I should not try to answer him by studying the works of other scholars, trying to answer his insinuations with some other human theory by which I would defend the Scriptures. I need not go into that at all. I need not go into philosophy to overcome the insinuations of the philosophers. I could remember what the Apostle Paul said, when writing to the Corinthians he reminded them that when he came to Corinth to preach he was resolved to "know nothing among them save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." And he did this on purpose, because he wanted their "faith to stand \ot in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God" (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

As a Christian I can trust God. I can trust the Scriptures. I can trust in prayer. I can trust in the Holy Spirit. I can go by the living God. I can put my faith in the living Lord Jesus Christ and look to Him to help me. This is the way I am to proceed and this will prepare me for the victory of grace. Isaiah warned Israel not to go down to Egypt to get help from Egypt to fight their battles, not to trust in the horses of Egypt ( which would be the military equipment of Egypt) to win their battles: they were to put their trust in the Lord. This is what I have in mind as I write these words. I would encourage people not to study in the works of men for spiritual strength. It will not be by reading books of men and certainly not by answering the questions that have been raised by critics of the Scripture or by critics of personal spiritual experience that I can come to faith and victory in Christ. I do not go into psychiatry to find out how a soul is to get right with God. I go to the Bible and look into the face of the Lord Jesus Christ revealed there, and believe in Him, and Almighty God will work in me by His grace that which is well pleasing in His sight. This is not to say that human understanding is of no help in personal living. There may be people who are in trouble whose hearts are disturbed, whose minds are confused, and whose spirits are heavy in doubt, who could go to some doctor, some psychologist, some psychiatrist and could be helped by competent professional care. But I am saying that I can look in to the face of the living Lord Jesus Christ, put my trust in Him, believing in Him that I might be saved, and can have a peace of God that passeth all understanding. I understand the Scriptures to say that so far as my soul is concerned, my Savior is Jesus Christ; so far as my heart and mind is concerned, the source of my faith is the Word of God and so I will read the Bible, put my faith in Jesus Christ, pray to God, and trust in Him that God's grace might work in me, rather than turn to any human argument of any sort to bolster my faith. I read the Scriptures that they might feed me in strength, and thus achieve the victory of grace. This way I can win in my spiritual warfare by

using weapons which are not carnal. I do not figure things out like human beings, and I do not try to reach conclusions that will satisfy my human mind, in order that I might believe in God. I read the Word of God, look to God, and trust in Him, and God will achieve in me that which is well pleasing to His sight.

## **Lion Undaunted**

Many elements in the life of a Christian combine to challenge his faith. There are worldly interests that seek my attention to the extent that I can neglect the things of God. There are intellectual persons who in their criticisms threaten the authority of the Bible. They talk as if it weren't true. There are some who may direct the church education program in ways that I honestly feel are not according to the teaching of Scripture. There are daily problems that the Christian has to face that can challenge his faith in Christ Jesus. But God, through His Word, by His Holy Spirit; in the heart of the believer will prevail.

The records in the Bible show that God has seen fit in times past to commit Himself to fellowship with His people here on earth. This is generally called "Zion." The people of God have certain traditions. Every church, congregation, or denomination comes to have some certain traditions. There are certain things that our fathers and grandfathers did which we feel that we ought to do. Some of the traditions of the Christian are: believing in the Bible, believing in the Lord, believing in heaven, believing in hell, believing in salvation, believing in the power of God. But the history of the Church shows a human tendency to employ natural means to promote spiritual service in His Name. In other words, it has been a tendency in the church to try to support the work of the church some other way than through prayer and reading and studying the Bible.

There have been things done through church leadership that were not based upon Scripture and this amounted to perverting the original meaning of Christian experience. But at the same time; new history has occurred in Zion. God has done some new thing. When the people of God, the Christian people, in their human way developed certain ways of doing things that were not according to Scripture the Lord has by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the people led them into new ways. An outstanding instance in history was the Protestant Reformation. At a time when the whole church in its leadership became committed to certain formal ecclesiastical ways of doing things so that the people of the church were "dying on the vine" for lack of spiritual vitality, Almighty God did something different. Something happened which we call the Protestant Reformation which brought into the life of His people an entirely new approach to Him.

Such events are happening to this day. Churches and denominations may follow human leadership away from what the Scriptures teach, but God is not committed to save any denomination, and God is not committed to save any congregation. God will work His will in the hearts of His people. He can always lead them out in a new way. This is why in the Protestant Church there have come to be so many different denominations. God has again and again led His people out in some new form, some new fashion, that they might be blessed. Sometimes His people have launched out into a new church by this very procedure and this has kept the activity of the Holy Spirit current in the hearts of the people. In this way, the promise of God to save and to bless has been reaffirmed.

The original purpose for God's people, that they should be His servants and that He would dwell with them, will be carried out in spite of human errors. Even though in a human way the church in its procedure may be doing things that hinder, and may reach certain conclusions that discount the Bible and sets it aside, God by His Holy Spirit working in new fashion brings His people back again to the realities of God. We are living in a time when there is widespread criticism of the Bible tolerated in churches, and when Christians are being led into actions contrary to Scripture. But at the same time among God's people everywhere God is raising up some who will go back to the Scriptures to take them as they are. These souls study the records of the Early Church, and by yielding to the indwelling and working of the Holy

Spirit actually have the original experiences of salvation reconfirmed for them. There are cottage prayer meetings, home Bible study groups, prayer groups, personal fellowships of believing people, starting up and going on everywhere in a way that is honoring the Holy Spirit and giving Christians an opportunity to grow nearer to God.

Christ's victory on Mount Zion is sure because God by His Holy Spirit will work in the hearts of His people quite apart from anything that man may seek to control. If, for example, I should be in a church where the pastor has in one way or another been led to do or to say what is not according to Scripture, or if I am in a congregation that is doing things not according to that which is the scriptural way of doing things, right in there, while I am in that church, God can work in my heart. God can show me the things of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I can rejoice in Him even if nobody else does. Thus the Lord Himself will work His will in my heart. But over and above what can happen to me personally is the glorious promise that every Christian knows about. One day the Lord Jesus Christ Himself will come from heaven with thousands of His angels in glory and in power to judge and to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Christ is coming again. He will carry out the Father's will. Nothing that man can do is going to stop Him accomplishing what His Father gave Him to do. Isn't it a wonderful thing to think that His Father gave Him the privilege of saving us by His power altogether apart from anything that any man may do. Our trust is in the Lord. This is what we can understand by the term "The Lion Undaunted."